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AL lawmakers to quit JS en masse

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League has dramatically decided to resign from the Jatiya Sangsad (parliament) in protest at a government move to remove Bangabandhu's portrait from all government, semi-government and autonomous bodies and its 'misrule', as well.

The ruling coalition headed by the AL's arch-rival BNP last week tabled a bill in the parliament seeking repeal of an act that made it mandatory for all government, semi-government and autonomous bodies to display and preserve the portrait of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Sources that the bill styled, "The Preservation and Display of Portrait of Father of the Nation (Repeal) Bill, 2002", is likely to be passed in the parliament on March 21, the next Private Members' day. The parliament had passed the act early last year while the AL was in office.

The decision was made at a joint meeting of the AL Central Working Committee and the party MPs yesterday. The party cited 'unabated repression on the political opponents and on the minority community carried out by the ruling coalition and breakdown of the country's economy and law and order' as reasons that forced it to take the decision.

General Secretary of the AL Zillur Rahman told newsmen that it was agreed in principle that all 58 party lawmakers would submit their resignation letters to the Leader of the AL Parliamentary Party (ALPP) Sheikh Hasina within a day or two.

The BNP-led alliance commands 220 seats (BNP 198, Jamaat-e-Islami 16, Bangladesh Jatiya Party four and Islami Oikya Jote two). Besides, Jatiya Party (Ershad) has 14 lawmakers, while others have eight MPs.

President of the AL and Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Sheikh Hasina chaired the five-hour long crucial meeting held at the party

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Footbridge collapse kills 2



PHOTO: STAR

People scramble to pull out the victims of the car crushed under the huge slab of the footbridge, which crashed down on the vehicle at the Science Laboratory intersection yesterday.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two persons were crushed to death when a concrete slab, weighing nearly 40 tonnes, from an under-construction footbridge fell on a Pajero jeep near the Science Laboratory on the intersection of Elephant Road and Mirpur Road at around 1:50pm yesterday.

AQM Mujibur Rahman, managing director of Magura Paper Mills under the BCIC, and Abu Taleb, driver of the jeep, were killed in the incident.

Taleb died on the spot when the huge slab crashed on the vehicle from a height of nearly 25 feet. A fatally injured Mujibur died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Officials at the police box hardly twenty metres away from the spot told The Daily Star that the huge slab was faultily installed and that they had alerted the higher authorities in writing about it on Wednesday. They added that they had also warned representatives of the contractor, Surma International, of the danger. However, they paid no heed.

According to Constable Jahangir, there was a big sound outside the police box at around 1:50pm. He rushed out of the room and saw that the vehicle was crushed under the nearly 35-foot slab.

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Criminal indifference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A traffic sergeant on duty at the Science Laboratory intersection where the collapse of a huge concrete slab crushed two persons yesterday informed the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) about the faulty installation on Wednesday noon.

On the basis of information by Sergeant Jahangir, the DCC sent a supervisor named Haroon on Wednesday night to the site to inspect the positioning of the footbridge slabs. Measuring the length of the slabs, Haroon certified that they were 'rightly centred'.

DCC Chief Engineer Md Mahmudur Rahman Khandaker believes that it was sabotage and no fault was found in the positioning of the slabs.

ALERT!

Seven footbridges are now under construction in the city without proper safety measures. On November 26 last year, one of these bridges collapsed, killing one person. Later press reports warned about improper construction of the remaining bridges. As the authorities did not pay attention, another footbridge collapsed yesterday, killing two persons.

Technocrat quota may go BNP under pressure to accommodate more non-MPs in cabinet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is considering abolition of quota for technocrat ministers under compulsion to induct more non-MPs into the cabinet without increasing its size.

The quota -- one technocrat for every ten elected members of parliament in the cabinet -- was introduced in 1991, when the country switched to parliamentary form of government through the 12th amendment to the constitution.

Sources close to the ruling BNP said the party was compelled to form a 60-member cabinet to accommodate some party leaders Prime Minister Khaleda Zia had promised to induct into the council of ministers.

The government is presently under pressure to include more technocrats in the cabinet to make good the prime minister's commitment, the sources added.

There is also tremendous pressure from the Jatiya Party and the Islami Oikya Jote, the two other partners

of the coalition, for slots in the cabinet.

The 60-member cabinet already comprises six technocrats -- five from the BNP and the other from the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh.

They are Social Welfare Minister Ali Ahsan Mujahid (Jamaat), State Minister for Commerce Barkatullah Bhulu, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Reaz Rahman, State Minister for Law Ukil Abdus Sattar, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin and State Minister for Cultural Affairs Selima Rahman.

According to sources, the BNP has now realised that formation of a jumbo jet cabinet was a wrong decision in the first place.

Criticism within and outside the ruling alliance aside, there is also pressure from donor agencies, which have long been advocating for smaller administration.

Moreover, BNP insiders say, the prime minister and

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One-page supplement on Lever Brothers (Bd.) Ltd.

Over 4000 expelled on first SSC exams day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 4,125 examinees were expelled for cheating across the country on the first day of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations.

Two teachers were also expelled for their alleged involvement in helping students to cheat.

A total of 12,01,887 students appeared at the SSC, SSC Vocational and Dhakil exams under nine education boards, which began amidst stringent measures to check adoption of unfair means.

However, mass-scale cheating

marked the examinations at different centres of the Rajshahi Board. Some 2,026 examinees were expelled for cheating at different centres of the Rajshahi Education Board, officials said.

They said two invigilators were also expelled from examination centres at Naogaon and Nawabganj districts for their alleged involvement in cheating.

A total of 168 students were expelled in Rajshahi, 60 in Nawabganj, 87 in Naogaon, 108 in Pabna, 320 in Sirajganj, 180 in Bogra,

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Murder case filed against Hasina

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A murder case against former prime minister and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina was filed with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, yesterday.

Two others were also accused in the case. They are former senior SP Hafizur Rahman Laskar and Motiur Rahman Rentu, writer and publisher of the book 'Amar Fansi Chai' (I want to be hanged).

The case was filed by Advocate Gazi Rabiul Islam Sagar, an assistant public prosecutor at the District Judge's Court, Dhaka.

The complainant alleged that during the rule of H M Ershad in 1983, Sheikh Hasina along with the two other accused had planned to oust him through violence.

The accused had planned that a procession would be brought out from the Dhaka University campus and police would open fire on it. As a result, some students would be killed or injured and this would intensify the movement against Ershadregime, the complainant said.

Accordingly, on February 14, 1983 at 10 am, the accused and a

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Hena questions Syed's wisdom

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The chief election commissioner's recent remark that he will not hold talks with any political parties on the city corporation elections is diametrically opposite to that of his predecessor.

"It would have been wise of the Election Commission if it had held talks with the political parties to make the atmosphere conducive to the election," former chief election commissioner (CEC) Mohammad Abu Hena told The Daily Star on the telephone last night.

He said, "There is no alternative to dialogues to ensure a congenial atmosphere for elections."

Abu Hena was trying to make the elections to the local government bodies credible through participation of all political parties, sources said.

As the then opposition BNP, now in power, opposed elections under Hena, the Election Commission (EC) could not even announce schedule for elections to Upazila Parishad, a local government tier, despite its full preparation.

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